INDIANA OFFICE OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

2006 Publications Focus Groups

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OBJECTIVES & METHODOLOGY

The Indiana Office of Tourism Development is charged with utilizing its resources to generate travel, and therefore spending, within Indiana. Though the office is an information source for potential visitors via myriad promotional vehicles, from paid marketing to public relations, one of its best known functions is producing and distributing travel publications, the largest being the Indiana Travel Guide.

Given that IOTD's financial resources are limited, these travel publications are largely subsidized by tourism industry partners around the state in the form of advertising. As such, it is important to communicate the value of these publications to both existing and potential advertisers. To this end, a series of four focus groups was conducted in the IOTD target markets of Chicago and Cincinnati to explore consumers' usage of these materials. The recruited respondents were all users of either state or local travel guides, and half of them had requested materials from Indiana.

The specific informational objects of this research included the following:

- **Investigate how consumers use information** during the trip planning process and identify key uses for travel guides.

- **Assess the current design of the Travel Guide**, including:
  - Cover
  - Layout
  - Editorial
  - Advertising

- **Identify the information considered most relevant in the Travel Guide** and the most effective ways in which to present it.

The screener used to recruit the focus group participants and the moderator's outline are included in the Appendix to this report.

The Indiana Office of Tourism Development spends a large portion of its resources on the production of two information sources: travel publications and Websites. While each medium contains relatively the same information, the two are used very differently by consumers. While guides are often used for detailed planning, the primary purpose of state travel publications is to generate ideas while the Web is used for detailed trip planning.

Travel publications are requested once a destination is being considered for a trip and often after the decision has been made to travel. As such, guides are most often used to get ideas about other attractions or events in and around the destination being considered. The timing of the planning process affects consumers' selection of informational sources be they print publications or Web-related. The process is often four-fold: 1) The Web is used to choose a destination; 2) Publications are employed for ideas about attractions, restaurants and events in and around a destination; 3) Bookings and mapping are done via the Internet; and finally 4) Travel guides are brought on trips for convenience and last-minute additions to trips.

While numerous steps are involved in travel planning, it is not a long process. As indicated by other research conducted for Indiana, most visitors (41%) are traveling within one month of requesting travel materials. Hence, it is important for fulfillment to be turned around quickly. Though focus group participants overwhelming utilize travel publications, many mentioned the time required to receive the materials as an impediment to usage. In fact, one Chicago respondent said of requesting the Indiana travel materials:

> *"I thought the lead time from when I sent in my request to when I received my information – I thought it was very long lead time. Almost to the point I had forgot about it."*

Often, when the receipt of fulfillment material does not meet the travel planning timeframe, consumers will visit a Website. Given that consumers are looking for specific information as their trip nears, they are more likely to visit a local destination Website or the Website of a specific attraction. As discussed in the July 2006 Indiana Web Research, consumers are using search engines for this function and state sites may not be appearing in their search results.

While the use of informational sources is not an "either or decision," as consumers use both guides and the Internet, in the end, consumers enjoy the travel planning experience. They look forward to it and want to feel involved in the process. According to a Cincinnati respondent:

> *"I use travel guides, even when I get on the Internet. I like something tangible in my hand to get excited about the trip. That's part of the fun – planning it."*

Print materials provide potential visitors with a tangible connection to a destination. Travel guides can be flipped through at one's leisure and shared with family members without having to print from the Internet. Given that travelers take guides along with them on their trips, they want them to be informative. The following summarizes what consumers want in their travel guides and how the Indiana Office of Tourism Development can tailor its publications for s consumers.

ORGANIZATION & CONTENT

There are as many ways to organize travel publications as there are states. While the Indiana Travel Guide has been organized in a similar fashion for several years, it works well for consumers. Generally, the guides are organized as follows: 1) statewide editorial; 2) regional advertising; 3) regional editorial; 4) regional listings; 5) regional grids; and 6) brochures and local visitor information.

This organization works for consumers for a number of reasons. Because travel guides are often utilized for trip planning, grouping statewide editorials at the beginning of the book gives potential visitors an overview of available attractions. The focus group participants mentioned appreciating the ability to ease into the planning process; beginning the guide with topical articles about the state prepares the reader for the more detailed information which follows. While editorial topics do not appeal to everyone, by highlighting the state's major selling points, potential visitors will find something that appeals to them. And as one focus group participant said:

> *"I like [the editorials]. I like to read about other experiences and see if it's something I would like to do. It balances out the rest of the book. If I don't care about a particular topic, I'll move to the next article. But I want to know where the locations are that are being discussed."*

The issue of wanting more detail about attractions in the editorial is important. While a "for more information" section follows each editorial, this does not give readers a sense of the geographic location of attractions. As such, the decision as to whether to include an attraction during a trip can be difficult. If an attraction has a listing, it would be helpful if a page number were referenced. For example, when Oliver Winery is referenced in the statewide editorial, it could appear as: Oliver Winery (pg. 118). While SMARI understands that the Indiana Office of Tourism Development retains editorial control of this content and the attractions listed are not necessarily advertisers with paid listings, where available, IOTD could make it easier for readers with this page-reference feature.

One interesting comment regarding statewide editorial and what would be read was more a consequence of design rather than content. Though there were six statewide editorials in the 2006 Indiana Travel Guide, those that were most often discussed in the focus groups began with a left, or even-page lead. It was as if they were not equating a right, or odd-page lead with the start of an article. One participant said that she did not realize that the Arts & Culture headline on page 7 of the Guide went with the text that followed.

Consequently, IOTD should attempt to start multi-page editorials on even-numbered pages.

The format of the statewide editorial is what consumers want from such content. While they want information about the best attractions, the regional "Must See" lists provide this. The front of the book should give potential visitors a feel for the state's offerings but lead them to where they can find more specific information for planning purposes. In this context, the current format of one feature could be altered. The "Get to Know Indiana" page is interesting to consumers and useful for children's school reports. However, it could be used for trip ideas if consumers were told where to go for bird watching or to visit a botanical garden or a limestone attraction.

The Indiana Guide has been organized by region for many years, as this is a convenient way to structure the publication for the Office of Tourism Development. The Guide merely follows the established regional divisions, and the focus group participants approved of this format. Rather than grouping like activities, such as hiking or shopping, regional organization facilitates an easier planning process.

> *"Being divided into sections, you know what area of the state you're looking at. I'm most often traveling to a particular area and not for an activity."*

While consumers might be interested in a particular activity when in the area, they are not going to travel the state to do the same sorts of things. Hence, a format based on geographic organization is more logical. Concerning organization within the regions, consumers find the progressions from editorial to listings to grids quite logical. Just as the statewide editorial eases them into the trip planning process, the regional editorial does the same, with a more narrow focus.

Finally, relative to content, consumers want pricing information, especially concerning attractions and restaurants. Because a legend already exists within the regional listings, the addition of pricing codes could be accommodated. Overall, the focus group participants were complimentary of the Indiana Travel Guide and its contents and organization. Heard in the focus groups:

> *"As far as state brochures go, I'd say it's one of the better ones."*

> *"Indiana's guide and Website are some of the most friendly and easy to use. I've used other destination guides and they're difficult to understand."*

COVER

Of course, consumers' first impression of the Indiana Travel Guide is based on its cover. The respondents were asked to discuss not only contents but the state publication covers. Indiana has used a single image on the cover of its Travel Guide for several years; rightfully so as it appeals to potential visitors. Consumers were most often drawn to

guides that employed a single, striking photo. However, they do want an image that accurately represents the destination, is appealing and grabs their attention.

For comparison, the groups were asked to rate the Indiana guide against a number of competitors, including California, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Ohio, South Carolina and Tennessee. Participants were very positive about the current Indiana Travel Guide cover and many thought it was among the best. It was eye-catching and reminded them there were unexpected things to see in the state. There are a few general comments regarding covers:

- *Don't look too corporate. A cover needs to embody the fun of travel.*

- *Show product without too much focus on people. Only show people in the context of how they can enjoy a destination or attraction.*

- *Multiple photos are confusing to consumers and detract from the overall impact.*

- *The most effective cover utilizes a single photo that tells potential visitors something they don't already know about the state.*

Several of the participants stated that the cover is not especially important in a guide. Often, guides are in the hands of consumers because they have been requested. They are eager to see the contents and do not spend a great deal of time evaluating the cover. Other respondents reported picking up guides in state information centers. Here again, the cover was considered unimportant. They are drawn to publications that offer the most reliable content, which are most often state guides. While the Indiana Office of Tourism Development wants to present motivating and compelling covers, like other photographs in the Guide, a cover shot should serve to generate trip ideas; it does not impact consumers' decision to continue reading.

PHOTOGRAPHY & MAPS

As discussed, the Indiana Travel Guide should be considered a medium for trip ideas. While this is obvious in the form of content, it can also be true of photography and maps. The importance of photography in travel publications can not be overstated. Consumers, especially during the decision-making process, want compelling, fun photography that gives them the sense of a place or an experience.

Travel planning is something that consumers enjoy, and photography plays a big role in creating a satisfying planning experience. Certain elements of the photos used enhance travel publications. First and foremost, the focus group participants said that they want to know what the photograph represents and where it was taken. Hence, captions should be attached to the photos.

In the 2006 Indiana Travel Guide, captions, when included, are clustered to identify all the images on a page or a spread. This approach is confusing to readers, as they must continually move from caption to photo. To make the Guide more user-friendly, each

photo should be labeled with its own caption. Just as consumers want to be able to cross reference editorial content with listings that contain additional information, the same can be done with photography. In both statewide and regional editorial, for those attractions with listings, IOTD should consider adding a page number. For example, a caption in the East region could read: Hoosier Park, Anderson (pg. 55). Additionally, the respondents noted that relative to photos and content, the photos should appear on the page in which they are discussed in editorial. For example, though the regional editorial discussion of East Race Watery is on page 27, the photo of the attraction is on page 25.

While consumers expect photographs to be included in their travel publications, they also appreciate maps. The respondents appreciated inclusion of the state map, though of course they would prefer a full-size, pull-out transportation map. While this idea is likely cost prohibitive, other mapping improvements can be made.

First, the respondents mentioned wanting larger regional maps. Though difficult with the horizontally-shaped regions, the maps could be made slightly larger. Secondly, they want to know where the attractions in the editorial and "More Must Sees" lists are located on the regional maps.

There are two options for accomplishing this. The first is to put a corresponding letter or number on the map. This would be easy to do for the must see lists. It would be slightly more difficult for the attractions listed in the editorial. As such, the map could be broken into a grid, as is the Indiana Travel Map. By doing this, attractions referenced anywhere within the regional sections – be it editorial, must see or photo caption – would have a corresponding map letter and number. As discussed earlier, however, consumers also want references for gathering more information. So, anytime an attraction is mentioned, it would appear as: Badlands Off Road Park, Attica (Map C3, pg. 96).

ADVERTISING

While production of state travel publications is a primary responsibility of the Indiana Office of Tourism Development, tight budgets require partnerships in the form of advertising to produce high-quality publications. For years, IOTD has struggled with the challenge of effectively presenting advertising in the Travel Guide. It essentially comes down to two choices: to allow advertisers to submit camera-ready ads *or* elements that would be incorporated into a format of IOTD's choosing. While advertisers pay for the space and believe they should be able to do with it as they please, IOTD has wanted to retain control of the look and feel of the publication.

In deciding which direction to take advertising in the publication, it is important to remember that consumers request state travel materials to gather trip ideas. They are looking for an information source to plan a trip, and they request the official state publication in the hope of being provided accurate and reliable information.

It is also important to know how consumers feel about advertising, in general. Their perceptions are not always positive, as heard in the focus groups:

"I don't look for ads to be objective. They have a different reason for being."

"I don't stop to look at ads; they have an agenda. [Ads] aren't something that interests me in any condition."

"[Advertising] is a necessary evil."

Before being presented with two future advertising options, the respondents had to ask if advertising in the current Indiana Travel Guide was actually advertising. Because formatted ads are viewed as informational, they are more credible and are something that consumers will read. In fact, some participants in the focus groups actually appreciated the formatted ads:

"[This] advertising is good because it's not all about hotels and commercial things. It's about historical things and really interesting things. It's actually things you might want to do."

"This is one type of ad layout I do like and will use."

When groups were shown the same advertising presented in two different ways, camera-ready and formatted, the respondents favored formatted ads. They were more apt to read and actually use formatted ads. Again, because formatted ads are perceived as informational pieces – some even referred to the ads as "articles" – they have more credibility than camera-ready ads.

Since consumers have a difficult time distinguishing formatted ads from editorial, they are more likely to be read. As such, the formatted ads are more likely to accomplish the goal of tourism destinations – to generate visitor spending.

"These books are ads and we know that. But the [formatted] is information plus an ad while the [camera-ready] is just a commercial."

While the respondents preferred the formatted advertising, they thought that in its current form it is too understated and subtle. The proposed design could be enhanced by using larger photos and a livelier font. Just because the ads are formatted does not mean that they can not have personality.

APPENDIX

FOCUS GROUP SCREENER

Hello, this is _____ from _____, an independent research company located in _____, and tonight we are recruiting participants for a discussion group. The group discussion will be held with individuals like yourself. May I ask...

S1. First, have you participated in a focus group discussion within the past 12 months?
       1…….YES **(THANK & TERMINATE)**
       2…….NO

S2. Who in your household is primarily responsible for making decisions concerning travel destinations?

	SELF…….............…….........-1	
	SELF/JOINT……….....................-2	
ASK TO SPEAK TO THEM--->	SPOUSE/OTHER………..............-T	

S2. Thinking of all the leisure vacation or weekend trips you have taken in the past year, how many have included at least one night's stay from home? [_____]
(IF QS2=0, THANK & TERMINATE)

1.   When you are thinking about taking a leisure trip, which sources of information do you use to gather information about destinations?
       1…….AAA or other travel club
       2…….Information/travel guide from state
       3…….Information/travel guide from local area
       4…….The internet
       5……Magazine or newspaper articles
       6……Magazine or newspaper advertisements
       7…….Television advertisements
       8…….Other, (specify) _____
       9…….DO NOT GET INFORMATION →**TERMINATE**
       (IF Q1_2 & Q1_3 =0 → TERMINATE)

These last few questions are for classification purposes only.

2.   Are you...?
       1...Married
       2...Not Married

3.   Which of the following categories best describes your age? (MIX)

       1 ....18 – 24
       2 ....25 – 34
       3 ....35 – 44
       4 ....45 – 54
       5 ....55 or over

5. How many children 18 years of age or younger are living in your household?   _____
(MIX OF 0 AND >0)

6. Is your total annual income for your household before taxes?

> 1 ....Less than $30,000
> 2 ....$30,000 to less than $50,000
> 3 ....$50,000 to less than $75,000
> 4 ....$75,000 to less than $100,000
> 5 ....$100,000 to less than $150,000
> 6 ....$150,000 or more

GENDER:
> MALE   ……………..1 (3 - 4 to show)
> FEMALE…………..2 (5 - 6 to show)

INVITATION

We would like to invite you to a group discussion regarding travel, which will include individuals like yourself.

REQUESTERS OF INDIANA GUIDE TO BE TOGETHER IN ONE GROUP IN EACH CITY (Client list)
INDIANA RESIDENTS TO BE MIXED INTO BOTH CINCI GROUPS

The discussion will be held on:

[ ] GROUP 1: Wednesday, August 9th   (6:00 - 7:30pm) – Chicago (Client list)
[ ] GROUP 2: Wednesday, August 9th   (7:30 – 9:00pm) – Chicago
[ ] GROUP 3: Thursday, August 10th (6:00 - 7:30pm) – Cincinnati (Client list)
[ ] GROUP 4: Thursday, August 10th (7:30 – 9:00pm) – Cincinnati

MODERATOR'S OUTLINE

Chicago/Cincinnati – August 9 and 10

I.   Introduction *10 minutes*

A)   Nature of Group Discussion

➢   Type of research

➢   Interest in feelings, attitudes, experiences, opinions

➢   No right or wrong answers

B) Explain Rules

➢   Mirror

➢   Mikes

C) Topics of Discussion

➢   Trip Planning process

➢   Use of information

➢   Evaluation of printed materials

D) Moderator & Respondent Introductions

➢   Name

➢   Family

➢   Occupation

➢   Area of Residence

II.   Overview of Travel Guide   **20** *minutes*

Purpose: Respondents will have been given the travel guide to review prior to the discussion and will have about 15 minutes to look at it. The discussion will begin with general impressions of the Guide, and will move to a more detailed review of various features and issues.

ONE SOURCE OF INFORMATION IS TRAVEL GUIDES THAT ARE PUBLISHED BY STATES AND DESTINATIONS.

    When do you use this type of travel guide?
        1.   What kind of information are you looking for?
        2.   Do you use these guides to choose a destination?
        3.   What specific guides do you recall using?
        4.   Do you use state Websites?
        5.   When do you use the state Website, and when the travel guide?
        6.   Do you want different information from the Website and the travel guide?
        7.   Do you prefer looking at a travel guide in hand or online?

YOU'VE BEEN LOOKING AT THE INDIANA GUIDE

    What's your general reaction to the Indiana Guide?
        1.   What's your favorite feature of the Guide?
        2.   Are there any features or parts of the Guide you don't like?
        3.   Would you say it…
             ▪   Provides a good representation of the state?
             ▪   Is well organized and easy to use?
             ▪   Is visually attractive?
             ▪   Provides all the information you need?
             ▪   Is easy to read?
        4.   Does it give you a good "picture" of Indiana?
             ▪   Are there enough pictures?
             ▪   Are they the right pictures?
             ▪   Do they make the state seem appealing?
        5.   Which features did you find most helpful? Least helpful?
        6.   Is there anything missing?
        7.   What information are you willing to go on-line to find, or request later?
        8.   What are the essential features? What are just nice to have?
        9.   What about lodging information in the Indiana Guide? Some lodging information now appears as advertising in the guide. What do you think about that? What other lodging information would you like to see in the guide?

    Let's look at some of the sections. How useful is…
        Would you read it? Would you use it?
        1.   Map (pg 2)
        2.   Get to know Indiana (pg. 3)
        3.   Magazine-like articles (pgs 4-21)?
        4.   Brochures available for order (pgs 144-146)?
        5.   Information for local visitors bureaus (pgs. 147-148)
        6.   City index (148)

Let's talk more about the articles in the front of the guide.

1. Are these things you would read?
2. Some of the themes in the articles range from wineries to girlfriend getaways to hiking. Do any of these things appeal to you?
3. What kind of things would draw you in to a longer article?
4. There are six of these articles – would you prefer more, fewer, or the same amount?
5. What do you think of the advertising in these sections?

III.   Detailed Discussion of Regional Organization   **20** *minutes*

Purpose: After getting overall impressions of the Guide the discussion will turn to a more detailed assessment of some of the regional sections, and exploration of some potential changes.

NOW THAT WE'VE REVIEWED THIS GUIDE OVERALL, I WANT TO LOOK AT SOME SPECIFIC FEATURES IN MORE DETAIL.

A. Most of the information in the guide is organized into travel areas based on regions of the state.
   1. Is it easy to find information on a particular area of the state?
   2. This is organized by geographic names (such as "North Region, South Central Region"). Is this how you would go about using a guide?
   3. Do you think each region is clearly distinguished?
   4. What would you think of organization by travel activities such as agritourism, outdoor activities and arts and culture? More helpful? Less useful?

B. Let's look at one of the regional sections (refer them to Central, pg. 67)?
   1. What's your overall reaction to the section?
      - Is it easy to browse?
      - Would you read it, glance through it?
      - What elements are you most likely to read?
   2. What do you think about the listings of attractions section (pg 79)?
      - Value and usefulness?
      - Sufficient information?
   3. What is your impression of the lodging listings (pg. 83)?
      - Would you use this to find a place to stay?
      - How easy is the information to read?
      - Would you rather use the Web for this?

IV. **Review of Ad Mock ups**   **20 minutes**

Purpose: The next section will look at a variety of advertisements and publications to assess the potential redesigns. The goal will be to explore how potential travelers react to the various options and to identify those that work.

NEXT WE'RE GOING TO CONSIDER ADVERTISING WITHIN THE GUIDE. I WANT TO GET YOUR REACTIONS AND FEEDBACK ON WHAT THINGS WOULD GET YOU TO CONSIDER VISITING A PLACE, VERSUS WHAT DOESN'T CATCH YOUR INTEREST.

    A. Now I'd like to show you some information on sites in Indiana (DISTRIBUTE FORMATTED AD)
        1.   What is your reaction to these?
        2.   Do they show interesting things?
        3.   Do they make you want to travel?
        4.   Do you think these are ads or articles?
    REPEAT ABOVE FOR FULL PAGE, HALF PAGE AND 1/6 SIZE

    B. There are different ways that ads can be presented, what you just saw was actually advertising. I'm now distributing more traditional advertising (CAMERA READY).
        1. Would you look at this in a travel guide?
        2. Would you respond?
    REPEAT ABOVE FOR FULL PAGE, HALF PAGE AND 1/6 SIZE
        3. Of the available formats, which do you prefer?
        4. Are you more likely to read one vs. the other?
        5. Do any motivate you to find out more information?

    C. So we've discussed the regional sections and advertising separately, now let's look at how the two come together. Go back to the Central Region. They have a section of ads (pg. 72).
        1. What do you think of grouping all of these together?
        2. Are you more likely or less likely to look at these attractions because they're all together?
        3. Do you think it's good that the ads are within their corresponding region or does that matter?

V. **Travel Guide Cover**   **10 minutes**
Purpose: Evaluate the cover photography and what consumers find motivating, specifically the use of single versus multiple photos.

We dove in to the content of the Indiana guide pretty quickly but didn't spend much time talking about the cover.
        1. What do you want to see on the cover of a guide?
        2. What do you think of the cover of the guide you have in front of you?
        3. Does it make you want to know more about the state?
        DISTRIBUTE GUIDES WITH ONE PHOTO AND MULTIPLE PHOTOS
        4. Because an important part of travel decision making is the use of photography, do you like seeing more variety or a single, more detailed photo?
VI.   **Closing Remarks**   **10 minutes**